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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, January 9, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TIME ON YOUR HANDS?" Information approved by the Extension Office, United States Department of Agriculture.

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People have different ideas about this month of January. I have one friend who thinks January is a dull and lonely month. She says the hours hang heavy on her hands. The weather keeps her indoors and cuts her off from company, and she hasn't enough housework to occupy her time. But I am glad to say that I have many other friends who look forward to this midwinter leisure to cultivate their handicrafts and hobbies.

Apparently, leisure may be a bore or a blessing, all depending on how you spend it. And January can be a month for moping and feeling abused, or for doing those pleasant things you haven't much time for the rest of the year.

I've been hearing lately a good deal about the women who are enjoying old-time handicrafts just as our grandmothers and great-grandmothers did. Weaving and rug-making and quilting are popular these days, and are often profitable, too.

Now for example, if you should take a peek into many a little farm home in Arkansas on these winter afternoons, you would find women busy braiding and hooking rugs. Back as far as 1918, handicrafts took their place in the program of the home demonstration clubs in Arkansas. When the Federation of Women's Clubs met at Hot Springs in that year, the home demonstration clubs put on an exhibit of their home crafts -- rugs and baskets and coverlets made by the mountain women and also some homemade furniture. Another much larger exhibit appeared at the meeting in 1934. That year these Arkansas women had made 3 thousand 768 rugs, some for their own homes, some for gifts, many for sale. Back in 1923 the women in one county organized a rug-makers' association which is still flourishing. The rag bag doesn't stand idle long in Arkansas, from what I hear. These clever women with the help of their home demonstration agents use rags, old stockings, old underwear and native wool from their sheep for handmade rugs. Some of them also spin and weave. One woman in Madison County uses native wool to spin and weave blankets.

Basketry is another art that is popular and profitable in Arkansas as well as in many other States. In Arkansas the farm women gather runners of the wild buck-bush and weave it into utility baskets as well as fancy baskets. In Mississippi and Georgia the women use honeysuckle vines to make their baskets. Mississippi women have worked up a very successful home basket industry using these native vines. In Florida farm women make baskets of palm fronds. In many parts of the South the long-leaf pine makes homemade baskets.

Texas is another State that boasts many a successful spare-time rug-maker. Texas housewives have worked up quite a profitable business in this handicraft.

I heard the other day about a Mrs. Hicks in Young County who has been braiding and hooking rugs for only 2 years but who made about a hundred dollars in 6 months of last year at this handicraft. Another Texas rug-maker reports that she can complete a hooked rug from sheep to the finished product in 49 hours. She says she averages about 1 dollar 19 cents a day at this work. Another Texas housewife who has been hooking rugs for 6 years now has a grand total of 62 rugs and 32 mats and chair seats to her credit. She has sold most of these.

Quilting is one of the most popular handicrafts in Oklahoma just now and many of the women and girls are having quilting parties just as their grandmothers used to do. In Wisconsin many women are spinning and weaving this winter, making table covers, bed covers, wall hangings, and so on.

Leather work is a popular handicraft in many States. In 50 counties in Texas last year the extension service had hide-tanning and leather schools for the farm people. Representatives came from 150 counties to these meetings. As a result several hundred men have prepared for their own use harnesses, rugs, and many other useful articles from their home-tanned leather. One farmer in Harris county tanned more than 60 hides in the past year, and one in Newton county, originally on relief, financed nearly all of his 1934 crop with the proceeds from his tanning. As for the women in the family, they have been using this home-tanned leather to make gloves, slippers, pocketbooks and so on. Other States interested in leather work are Nebraska, Wyoming and New Jersey, where the women have been making purses, bill folds, book marks, key rings and other small but useful leather articles. In New Jersey women have been especially interested in tooling leather.

Metal and woodwork have also become popular leisure-time occupations. Last year in the city of Rochester, New York, housewives in home demonstration clubs learned to make flower bowls and candle-sticks of hammered lead; bowls and trays of copper; and even hammered bracelets of German silver. These good-looking silver bracelets of Indian design cost their makers anywher from 7 to 11 cents apiece for material. And speaking of jewelry, reminds me of what a clever man in Arkansas is doing with his spare time. He got his inspiration from the wood-work the women's clubs were doing and started making wooden bracelets and dress clips. He carves his jewelry from walnut and polishes and waxes it himself. Now he is making a small income from this odd-hour handicraft.

But I've been talking almost entirely about handicrafts today and I want to tell you something about the hobbies that are making winter leisure happy for many a family. In Connecticut a year or two ago one of the specialists at the State College put some serious thought on that old saying about "all work and no play." He noticed that many of the older people in the State had no idea how to occupy their time when they had days off from regular work. And many of them had had all days off for 2 or 3 years. He thought these people needed good games for recreation -- games to suit different ages and interests, and games for families to play at home together. So he organized meetings to show people how to build their own home play equipment -- game boards carved from rare woods and puzzles of all kinds. This hobby immediately became popular with fathers and mothers and boys and girls.

Any remedy for those January "blues"? Why not try a handicraft or a hobby?

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